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The Cuban Prisoners

AS MORE DETAILS are disclosed, the ransom release of 1,113 Cubans captured in the debacle of the Bay of Pigs invasion becomes one of the big dramatic stories of this dying year.

It is now confirmed, as has been long suspected, that the United States government played an important, and perhaps decisive, role behind the scenes in obtaining the release of the men from Castro's vile prisons by payment of \$53 million worth of medicines, drugs and baby foods.

The government, meaning the administration, should have been actively concerned. It has had a bad conscience in this affair. The Cuban patriots were trained in this country with the aid of the administration and the CIA. Then, by an incredible bungle, when the invasion attempt was under way they were denied the military support, most importantly air cover, that was essential if the effort was to succeed.

THUS, IT IS NOT surprising that President Kennedy, who accepted personal responsibility for the debacle, named his brother, the attorney general, to a committee to analyze what went wrong. It followed that the President and the attorney general were involved in one way or another in the long and often seemingly hopeless negotiations to bring about the release of the prisoners.

It was the President who suggested the name of James B. Donovan, New York lawyer, to serve as counsel to the negotiating committee. Since last June Mr. Donovan has been serving without pay, and it is his patience, skill and persistence that brought it off.

In addition, nine lawyers, friends of Mr. Donovan, gave up their private practices for two weeks to take part in the operation. The Internal Revenue Service got into the act with assurances to drug companies that their contributions could be deducted from taxes as donations to charity. The Red Cross, railroads and airlines pitched in.

This was a complex operation in humanity and we, as an American newspaper, feel better now that it has succeeded. And we do not believe, as some appear to, that it will embellish Castro's image throughout Latin America.